

## Walking with the Earth

### Intercultural Perspectives on Ethics of Ecological Caring

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#### The motivation

This publication project is rooted in the beginning of a conversation between two colleagues and the subsequent invitation extended to the Globethics.net network and online community, as space for mutual learning, co-creation and exchange. A scholarly, interdisciplinary and also intercultural conversation, marked by individual experiences of walking with the earth in different contexts, and by intellectual encounters with portraits of lives lived in proximity with natural elements. As Yaffa describes *“Thousands of years ago, the ancient yogis lived in the forests, the mountains, and the caves of India.”* (“How to explain what yoga is to children.” OM Yoga Magazine, 2021), and Schopen adds: a typical monk today may not so easily recognize himself in such a view. *The monks “certainly did not wander alone in the forest cut off from all social interaction, nor spend much time meditating at the root of a tree. He almost certainly would have been far too busy.”* (“On monks and menial laborers” in Archetti, Capomastri, Artigiani: *L’organizzazione dei canieri e della produzione artistica nell’Asia ellenistica*, Ed. by P. Callieri. Rome: Istituto Italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente. 2006, 225-245, 225).

#### The general scope

The natural and the social world divide is a product of Western thought (Enlightenment), a thought that produced and required the othering of nature. “Walking with the earth” aims at questioning the dichotomy between nature and the social world/culture.

We invite you to reflect on the ethical underpinnings of being related with the earth and all living beings from the standpoint of diverse experiences, disciplines and schools of thought in all regions of the world. This intercultural endeavour will offer insights and responses beyond a comparative anthropological project on values; it will constitute a way to define and ground a genuine framework for ecological caring across cultures.

If the nature/culture divide is fallacious, as we believe, then other related divides should also be questioned, such as the perception that law and ethics are two systems of organisation of life as a cultural system. One focuses on life as an external phenomenon, in legal texts, rites and customs, whilst the other focuses on cultural life including inner experiences, such as values, norms, ethics and spirituality. Ecological caring sets a more precise focus on a non-relativistic ground for engaging with cultures, networks of relationships and systems of values.

Ecological caring poses the question of interrelation in times of disruption afresh. Beyond a knowledge-oriented concern for the urgency of the ecological crisis, it addresses the symbolic and imaginary resources needed in order to reconnect with the other and the earth at all levels. It constitutes a way of (re)thinking a new revolutionary pilgrimage as we discover that nature is walking in us, as much as we are walking in the nature. Literally and in the axiological sense, a trans-valuation of all values is operating in our minds and bodies.

The radical and life-threatening acceleration of the ecological crisis increasingly shows the urgent need of a new systemic conversion to values, different from blind economic expansion and

destruction of the natural environment. The project of mutual understanding of the human reality becomes as urgent as a deeper reflection on and commitment to the foundations of values and knowledge conducive to developing alternative models of living together, different from the dominant and predatory Western paradigm of production and consumption.

## **Objectives of the book:**

Contributions from authors of all continents are expected to assist in

- Cultivating a space for intellectual co-creation as an intercultural project;
- Contributing to interdisciplinary exchange on one of the most challenging ethical themes of contemporary times;
- Advancing the intercultural discourse on ecological caring and ethics of care in theory and practice, with the following, non-exhaustive, salient foci:
  - a. Encouraging comparative perspectives (e.g. comparative religious, comparative value systems, axiology, reasoning on values, hermeneutics), comparative and soft law and governance;
  - b. Inviting the description and analysis of ecological caring from the perspectives of religions and worldviews ('from-within', i.e. eco-theological, eco-religious, eco-philosophical views in one tradition, or comparative, e.g. Christian-Hindu, Christian-Buddhist, Muslim-Hindu, etc. or traditional religions and indigenous worldviews) and the cognitive and practical re-arrangements they provoke;
  - c. Deepening the cross-cultural understanding of the nexus between life-styles, ascetic practices, dietetic recipes and cognitive and bodily exercises and experiences of the Self, with the leading question: what does the spiritual return to nature mean?
  - d. Fostering the debate on ethics in an intercultural perspective with particular attention to cultural frameworks for ethical reasoning in diverse fields in which ecological care comes to application, such as education, social work, agriculture, nutrition, economy, global migration, meteorology and public health.

## **Structure of the book:**

- **Front matter**
- **Foreword**
- **Editors' Introduction: Caring about Ethics – Ethics of Caring**

In traditional schools of ethical thought the ideas of justice, righteousness and appropriateness are central. Approaches of an ethics of care have brought to our attention the necessity to qualify ethical discernment not only in terms of (general and universally applicable) standards, but also with regard to responses to individual situations, to vulnerability, relationships and interdependence. The editors endeavour to describe an ethics of ecological caring as a valid framework for an intercultural ethical conversation.
- **Chapter 1: Encountering the Earth – The Earth Encountering Us**

(Contextual, biographical, contemplative experiences)

Human encounters with the earth are multifaceted. For a long time anthropocentric perspectives of how the earth serves humankind and its survival have been dominant. However, there has always been a subtle counter-current: the awareness that the earth and forms of life on earth bear an intrinsic value, and therefore interrogate time and again human existence and responsibility in a fundamental way.

Such an interrogation is valid for example with regard to the modification of our natural perception in order to reach a closer contact with nature. There are cultural and historic examples for the enhancement of spiritual experiences as means to reach a deeper level of contemplation of the nature. In this context, one may ask about the boundaries of natural contemplation vs. an artificially enhanced experience of nature. One of the central ethical questions to discuss cross-culturally, however, is how our current ways of enhancing the contemplation of the nature may lead out of the destructive commodification of the earth.

- **Chapter 2: The Double Critique of the Ecological Crisis**  
(systemic, intellectual, ethical, spiritual, etc., interrogations)  
Ethics of care offers responses to the search for axiological foundations in a convincing way. However, seeking these foundations remains challenging to some extent, as it involves searching for common viewpoints that are able to serve as bridges of understanding between the various contexts without reducing the depth and richness of the reality, nor affirming a cynical relativism. We will have to ask how such a foundation of an ethic(s) of care, in times of a general disinterest for great foundations and the ‘twitterisation’ of the mind, can constitute a constructive starting point.
- **Chapter 3: Cross-Cultural Pedagogies for an Ethics of Ecological Care**  
How do we teach walking with the earth? Methodological findings related to the ways spiritual and intellectual leaders transmit the proximity and wisdom of a continuity across nature and culture, as a way of living can be inspirational in this regard. This also includes curriculum development initiatives with an applied ethics focus on deconstructing the nature/culture bias.
- **Chapter 4: Politics of the Earth: From discourses to (shaping) practical contexts of ecological caring**  
Ecological caring is also a matter of political ethics and the ethics of decision-making. It solicits our thinking and acting on how we can bridge the discrepancy between party politics and its four-year election agenda, with the timespan needed to counter environmental degradation through a deep systemic change of human behaviour. The role of civil society, religious communities, and international organisations cannot be emphasised enough as important actors for a soft and values-driven revolution.

The rapid progress of mastering techniques, pertaining to all forms of engineering, and in particular to information technologies, is directly contributing to the increase of the production of goods (gross national product), but also to energy consumption, and therefore constituting a threat to the environment. Is engineering science only capable of global wrongdoing, by harmfully impacting the planet? (Information-)technology should also be seen as a tool to reach and comprehend the other, in allowing us to better understand that we are part of a plural world, where we could start doing things better together. This also pertains to better balancing our life as new cyber-citizens, critically facing the bias of our systemic problems.

- **Conclusion: Towards an eco-esth-ethic(s)?**  
Information technology may invite us to think of new forms of life in terms of “eco-esth-ethic” forms of life, renewing the aesthetical concept of bio-morphism, in search for a novel psycho-aesthetic experience and imagination of life. This may lead to a radical transformation of the society and ways in which people are living together with one another

and with nature, via poetry, literary narrative or performing arts, close to our material imagination (Greek: *hyle*: spiritual and material at the same time). Cultures with softer borders between institutional societal structures and environmental life cycles, mediated for example through rituals and cross-generational ecological wisdom.

- **Resources Section:**

Bibliographies, case studies and project reviews, curriculum concepts, etc., related to ecological caring.

**Call for contributions:**

We invite authors to submit contribution to the four above-mentioned chapters. Contributions on the understanding of ecological caring from indigenous and traditional worldview perspectives, theoretical and conceptual reflections on an ethics of relationships and the relation between nature, culture(s) and the human-non-human are particularly welcome. We also invite innovative contributions at the intersection of disciplines (e.g. anthropology and natural sciences) and articles investigating specific ethical concerns (e.g. ecological caring and the pandemic; racism, collective cultural trauma and ecology; justice and environmental footprint; waste and culture;).

In addition, we are welcoming contributions to the resources section of the volume, which could take the format of brief case studies, biographical portraits and stories, project reviews and curriculum concepts related to the theme of the volume.

**Language:**

The book will be published in English (translations into other languages at a later stage are possible). We therefore ask you to deliver the text in English. In exceptional cases original manuscripts may be translated from other languages into English upon prior consultation with the editorial manager and indication of the language.

**Length of contributions:**

1 book page (layout, A5) is equivalent to about 1800 characters with spaces. The proposed length should not be less than 9000 characters, but should not exceed 15'000 characters.

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**Style guide:**

- **File format:** Open Word document (.docx)
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- **Font size:** 12 pt.
- **Sub-titles:** Calibri light, bold (without numbering)
- **Footnotes:** Font size 11 pt. (no endnotes) with full bibliographic references for all directly and indirectly quoted works
- **Bibliography:** 3 to 5 additional bibliographic references to be included at the end of the contribution (no repetition of quoted works in footnotes)
- **Author's bio:** 3 to 5 lines including title, country of residence/origin, professional occupation, main area of research or interest, and 1 to 2 publications, as applicable.

**Total length of the volume:**

250-350 pages

**Editorial and production timelines:**

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- Final-version-approvals with authors 19 November 2021
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**Date of book launch:**

The book is planned for publication in the week commencing the 13th December 2021.

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